DR. B.N. KALLA
(RECIPIENT OF PRESIDENT'S AWARD)

AFGANISTAN IN ANCIENT SANKRIT LITERATURE

The territory between the Sindhu & the Hindu Kush mountains may be regarded culturally as a part of India during almost the whole of the Hindu period. The reference in the Rig-Veda to the rivers Kubha (with its tributary the Suvastu) the Krumu & the Gomati which have been identified respectively with the Kabul, the Swat, the Kurrum and the Gomal rivers and the tribes like the Alinas, Bhatanases and the Pakthas who played a prominent part in the battle of ten Kings leaves no doubt that Indo-Aryans in the Punjab were intimately associated with Afganistan.

But the eastern regions of Afghanistan were always regarded politically as part of India and the rest of the territory remained Indian in culture and predominantly with in the political orbit of India, although subjected, like the Punjab, to the influence of the Persions , The Greeks, the Parthians, The Scythians and Kushans. The Mauryas exercised effective rule over the whole of Afghanistan and Baluchistan, and both Buddhism & Brahmanism had a strong influence over the whole area until the advent of Islam.

Most of the dynasties that ruled in Afghanistan and Baluchistan came under the influence of Indian culture which had taken deep roots in the soil. Their coins and inscriptions, works of Art, religion and literature and Indian in character, so far as recorded evidence goes, we can hardly separate eastern Afganistan and Baluchistan from India from either a political or cultural point of view. Even in the 2nd century A.D. Ptolemy (Greek astronomer) included this region in India. We learn from Isidor of Charex (First Century A.D.) that Arachosia (Qandahar region) was called 'white

India' by the parthians. How strong this conviction has been through out the ages is proved by an old saying quoted by Abdul Fazal that Kabul and Qandahar were the twin gates of India. The great French scholar James Darmestater inferred from the Iranian scriptures that "Hindu civilization prevailed in those parts (Kabul & siestan) which infact, in the two centuries before and after Christ, were known as white India and remained more Indian than Iranian till the Muslim conquest".

Central Asia: The territory beyond the Hindu Kush mountain was also profoundly influenced by India Culture. The Mauryyan Empire, which included a part of these territories and the missionary Zeal of Ashoka must have Contributed directly to this land. The Geeks Shakas, the Yueh-chi and Parthians, who ruled later in this region adopted Indian religion and used Indian scripts and languages. As these people extended their rule over some parts of India, the peoples beyond the Hindu Kush came into more intimate contact with Indian culture.

We have evidence to show that Buddhism and along withit Indian culture was spread among the Parthians, the Yuoh-chi, the Sogdians and various other people of central Asia before the beginning of the Christian era. Evan the Sassanians of the third century A.D. regarded Bactriana as virtually an Indian Country and the Oxus, a river of Buddhists and the Brahmans. The Greek writers always, at Bactriana with India and state that thousands of Brahmans and Shramans (Buddhist Monks) reside there.

In order to understand properly the expansion of Indian Culture in this region, we must have a clear idea of the different routes between India and China passing through Central Asia. The main route proceeded along the valley of the Kabul river and reached the Hindu Kush mountains through Purshapura (Peshawar) Nagar Hara (Jalalabad) Bamiyana and other cities, Beyond the Hindu Kush lay Bahlika (Bactriana, modern Balakh). From this region three well known roads leads to the Tarin basin.

Buddhism was the prevailing religion in Kashgar or ancient Shailadesha, Yarkand, Khotan, Kuchi, Agnidesha (modern-Qarashahar) and Turfan etc. This is proved not only by the discovery of images and the remains of the Buddhist stupas, shrines and viharas built after Indian models, but also by a large number of Buddhist Texts written in Sanskrit and Prakrat as well as in local languages of central Asia and in Indian scripts both Brahmi and Kharoshthi. A large number of secular documents have also been discovered there.These are written in Indian languages and scripts on wooden tablets, leather, paper and silk.

Another document on a silk strip contains fragments of a letter or order. Another document on silk contains nine inscriptions in Prakriet containing a prayer for the health of an individual and his family. It is interesting to note that some of the phrases used in the prayer are almost identical with those found in the Indian inscriptions of the Kushana period. It may be added that many documents in non Indian language were written in Indian script have been found in central Asia.

Most of the documents are in the form of letter with the names of the addresses written on the covering tablet. Many of the persons who wrote them, or to whom they were sent, bear names which are either purely Indian such as Bhima, Bangusena, Nandasena, Shamasena, Shitaka, Upajiva etc or else look like Indian adaptations such as Angacha, Kushana, Sena etc. Some of the official designations are also India, for example, chara (Spy) duta (envoy) etc. Stein has pointed out how the style of writing in these records follows closely the instructions given in the Kashmiri manual Loka Prakasha authored by Kshemendra (Tenth century A.D.).

Inreligion and literature, so in art, central Asia was deeply influenced by India. The art of Buddhist Khotan can be shown to have remained to the last under the predominating influence of Indian models. Though other influences like Iranian and Chinese might have been at work, the Graeco

Dr. Dhani Vice-Chancellor of Qaydaizm University has deciphered an inscription written in Sharadacharacter in Sindha. He confirms that inscription belonged to Shahi Brahmans of Kabul /Qandahar on the basis of this inscription.

As teachers we must inculcate the sense of Aesthetic among the student so that Such ugly thing will not happen in future.

The author delivered a lecture on the above topic in the Deptt Of Centre of Central Asian Studies. The University of Kashmir, Srinagar in 2004.

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DR. B.N. KALLA,
R/o H. No. 57, Sect.-8,
Trikuta Nagar, Jammu.
Ph. 2471616